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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9913
INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1157
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 0227
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3803
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1630
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8627
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 6863
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4939
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2991
RUEHNW/AMEMBASSY OSLO 4900
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4006
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9256
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6566
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1107
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHG/USMISSION GENEVA 3489
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHMFIU/CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN)
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREF MOPS PHUM PGOV PREL ASEC CE
SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 65

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Colombo 459 F) Colombo 456 G) Colombo 454 H) Colombo 448 I) Colombo
435 J) Colombo 432 K) Colombo 425 and previous

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Rajapaksa has invited co-Chairs Ambassadors to a meeting on May 5; post requests guidance from Washington. The Government of Sri Lanka continued to refute reports of shelling in the civilian safe zone, and accused the UN of "spying" following the leak of a UNOSAT report containing satellite imagery of shelling damage. Embassy sources and the media report shelling of a makeshift hospital within the safe zone on May 2. Japanese Representative Yasushi Akashi departed Sri Lanka on May 2 with few tangible outcomes, and a British delegation including former Defense Secretary Des Browne arrived on May 4. Aid agencies warn too little food is entering the conflict zone. END SUMMARY.

MAY 5 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT

¶2. President Mahinda Rajapaksa has invited co-Chairs Ambassadors in Colombo to a discussion on May 5. Post appreciates Department guidance for this discussion following the Co-Chairs phone call today, May 4.

GSL ACCUSES UN OF "SPYING"

¶3. (SBU) On May 1, Al Jazeera aired an interview with Foreign

Secretary Palitha Kohona in which he admitted the Government has shelled the civilian "safe zone" despite earlier Government disavowals. Al Jazeera showed satellite imagery with UNOSAT analysis that document shelling and air bombing damage within the designated "safe zone" between February 15 and April 19. Kohona then admitted the Government had shelled the safe zone, but maintained that it was prior to any civilians being in those areas. Al Jazeera then showed footage from an earlier interview with Kohona and with military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara on April 19, the same day as the satellite images were taken, in which he protested the Government was not shelling due to civilian presence in these areas.

¶14. (U) The Government has responded to this embarrassment by accusing the UN of "spying" on a member state. UN Resident Coordinator Neil Buhne was summoned in to meet Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe on May 1 to explain the leak. Anti-UN stories ran in local press during the weekend of May 2-3. The Ministry of Defense called into question UNOSAT analysis of the satellite images. A UNOSAT spokesman explained that the report had been inadvertently uploaded to a UN website.

LTTE CLAIMS GSL SHELLING OF HOSPITAL

¶15. (U) International media and multiple Embassy sources reported shelling of the makeshift hospital within the conflict zone on May 12. Pro-LTTE website Tamilnet posted photographs and alleged that the shelling killed 64 civilians and wounded 87. A health worker in LTTE-controlled territory reported 23 civilians killed and 34

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injured. The Government countered that the photographs were LTTE-produced fakes. Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara, Sri Lanka's military spokesman, claimed, "There is no shelling taking place; we have never shelled this place." The Government continues to state that no civilians have died as a result of Government forces' activities and that the only deaths have been due to LTTE suicide bombing or attacks on fleeing civilians.

DES BROWNE, AKASHI DELEGATIONS

¶16. (SBU) Japan's Representative to Sri Lanka for Peace-Building, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Yasushi Akashi wrapped up his seventeenth visit to Sri Lanka on Saturday, May 2. His visit included travel to internally-displaced persons (IDP) camps in Vavuniya and meetings with the President and the Defense Secretary. On May 2, Akashi announced a \$4 million emergency humanitarian contribution from the Government of Japan to Sri Lanka. Akashi publicly urged the LTTE to let civilians leave the conflict zone. In a May 2 meeting with Charge and representatives of other diplomatic missions, Akashi described his visit to the Manik Farm IDP site, where he interviewed several civilians. He noted that some LTTE leaders had been detained to face prosecution, while other combatants will be rehabilitated. The largest group in the camps are civilians awaiting resettlement or return to their original villages. Akashi claimed the Government had either released or decided to release the 13 local UN staff members in IDP camps. Akashi noted that Government officials assured him that screening of IDPs takes place only at Omanthai, and there was no dispute that ICRC would continue to be present at the checkpoint. Akashi stated that President Rajapaksa made a distinction between defeating LTTE and addressing "Tamil issues." Akashi believes the Government is committed to offering a political solution.

¶17. (U) British envoy Des Browne, whose appointment by the UK as special representative to Sri Lanka resulted in a diplomatic spat between the nations in February 2009, arrived in Sri Lanka on May 4. Browne joins four members of the British Parliament; their visit will also include travel to Vavuniya IDP camps.

GSL LEAFLETS CONFLICT ZONE

¶18. (U) On May 1, the Government dropped leaflets urging civilians to

flee the conflict zone. The text of the leaflets reads: "I am aware of the tremendous difficulties faced by the civilians who are unfortunately still being held hostage by the LTTE in the 'no-fire zone'. Your suffering is prolonged by this action of the LTTE who are holding you as a human shield for their own safety and security.

I appeal to every one of you to come over to the cleared areas. My government will continue to give utmost priority to ensure the safety and welfare of each and everyone of you."

¶9. (SBU) A Sri Lankan Air Force contact notes that UAV coverage showed few civilians escaping in recent days. A source in the Navy said there have been continuous Sea Tiger engagements in the last several days, but reported no significant Sea Tiger losses. The Sri Lankan Navy lost one small craft on May 3 in an accidental

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explosion, and another small craft was damaged on May 4 by LTTE mortars and guns. An Embassy contact reports the possible loss of a Sri Lankan Navy boat last week.

UPDATE ON HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

¶10. (SBU) Aid organizations emphasize the urgent food needs of the estimated 50,000 -70,000 trapped civilians. Heightened military activity offshore of the conflict zone negates the possibility of further large seaborne food shipments, as prior 1000MT-plus shipments required a four- to five-day offloading period. Only 70MT was delivered during the week of April 27-May 1; assuming at least 50,000 people remain, at least 190MT are required per week at survival rations level. The UN World Food Programme is exploring use of additional ferries to conduct more frequent food shipments.

¶11. (U) Minister of Healthcare and Nutrition Nimal Siripala de Silva reported ongoing staff and medical equipment shortage due to the massive influx of IDPs. On May 1, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid office (ECHO) water, sanitation, and hygiene advisor reported that the Government is drilling 120 hand-pump wells in Manik Farms IDP site. The wells are expected to provide 10 liters per person, benefiting an estimated 115,000 people. (Note: According to a ground water study conducted by ICRC, wells may not work due to insufficient ground water. UNHCR continues to advocate for alternate IDP camp sites in Vavuniya instead of the expansion of Manik Farms camp site, in part due to insufficient water. End note.)

MOORE